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Libyan Bedouin MT9

[Information on the Grand Sanusi of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, religious head of the Sanusiya Order, will be found in Category 793.]

[For general information on the functional role and status of the shaikh (or shaikhs), see Category 554; for specific information on their political functions as representatives of district tribal segments, see Category 634; for information on their roles as heads of their respective kin groups, see pertinent 61 Categories; information on their roles as religious leaders will be found in Category 793.]

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[For information on the political role of the omda (umda) as a representative of the more powerful and numerous tribal segments within an administrative district, see Category 634.]

621 which ranges from two to ten kilometers. The camp coincides with the
233 herding unit. The herd of the camp is usually grazed as a unit, often
621 by a paid shepherd hired by the members of the camp as a whole. Origi-
233 nally the camp moved as a unit for grazing. This was essential in the
621 era of the tribal warfare and raiding where the security of the herd
361 and that of the people depended on such collective movement. In a type
178 of organization adapted to periodical movement, the camp offered the optimum sized community: small enough to permit easy movement and large enough to offer the kind of protection which individual families could
621 not have offered. In this era the camp seemed to have been a closely
178 knit group. Many of the informants still remember the time when the
622 camp was under the strong control of the headman who made the major de-
361 cisions of where and when the camp should move. It was those decisions
233 that determined the safety and the security of the group. The headman had strong authority over members of his camp. Such authority was based mainly on his ability to exercise valid judgments as to whether or not the group should move and the route that it had to take if movement was decided upon. At the present time, and with the diminishing of raiding and tribal warfare in the area, the authority of the headman seems to have diminished along with it. The camp appears at the present time to be mostly a residential unit with minimal leadership and with a rapidly changing composition. Different families join the camp at different times during the year.

621 Although the membership of the camps is drawn from the bait, a camp
613 does not, in terms of its genealogical composition, make up a descent segment of that Bait. The membership of a camp is based on a completely

had started in the area at that time. No special permission was required for the newcomer to join the camp. He only got the permission of the person whose tent was at the far end of the camp to put his tent next to it. The first night after the man joined the camp, his next door neighbor slaughtered a goat in honor of the new member and invited all members of the camp.

Leaving the camp also does not require any permission, although the custom specifies that before one leaves he should inform either his neighbor or the headman of his time of departure. With the exception of cases where the headman of a particular camp is at the same time the Aqila of the bait, the headman of the camp has no authority over the members of the camp. He is usually called upon to solve minor problems between brothers or husband and wife, or give his opinion in decisions of minor importance. "A headman is like a father," said one informant, "we call him kabir el-nagi (the old man of the camp)." When a member of the nagei is involved in a serious dispute with another, the one to handle the case is the aqila or awaqil to whom the two disputing parties belong.

Group	Leadership	Identifying aspects
Kabila	None	Client groups attached.
Eila	None	Vengeance group, Vaguely defined tribal land ("watan").
Bait	Aqila	Corporate land-holding. Formally recognized leadership.
Nagei	Headman	Residential unit with unsegmented structure.

His success in solving disputes between members of his baits and outsiders might enhance his prestige within the bait, but it is not a substitute for patrilineal succession as the basis of the Aqila's authority. But in less integrated baits the situation is different. The ineffectiveness of the Aqila in solving disputes may lead members of his bait to seek another man as their representative who would act as a mediator in their behalf. If this continues for a long time the Aqila might find himself with no functions and the new person would become a de facto Aqila.

The Aqila represents the only effective indigenous form of leadership among Awlad Ali at the present time. The camp headman provides another form of leadership on the camp level, but, as mentioned before, the leadership of the headman is very limited and involves minimal authority. In addition to the indigenous leadership represented by the Aqila, there is the superimposed administrative structure of the government representative in the form of the "omda" system introduced into the area by the government decree no. 1187 of 1958. The system of omda or mayorship is essentially that applied to the rural areas of Egypt with certain modifications to fit the tribal organization and the semi-nomadic existence of the populations of the Western Desert. In rural areas, the omda is the administrative head of the village. He is appointed by the government from among the village inhabitants who have certain qualifications with regard to education (must be able at least to read and write), wealth (own at least 5 feddans of land in the area), and sound reputation. As such, the omda system in the rural areas is a territorial system. The omda's authority covers the territory of the village and all individuals living in it regardless of their kinship affiliation.

622 554 His main function is to manage the affairs of the village, apprehend crininals, report and register births and deaths, collect taxes and represent the government in all matters involving the relationship between the government and his village. Because of his position as the [661] representative of the govrernment, he usually enjoys a considerable amount of power which, over the years, many omdas have used it to obtain personal benefits.

361 631 In 1958 the committee appointed for the examination of the possibility of applying the system to Awlad Ali noticed that villages in the sense of a compact settlement similar to that existing in the rural area simply do not exist in the Western Desert region. There are a few settled communities in the area but they are scattered homes or a few stores. These communities have no identifiable boundaries or administrative existence. The area as a whole is divided into ten administrative districts, each having a police station. These districts correspond to the old Senusia Zawyas which played an important role in maintaining order in the era until the First World War. Until that time the area was divided into fourteen zones each of which was under the jurisdiction of one of the zawyas. The zawyas were mainly religious centers, or shrines, inhabited and directed by a member of the Senusi order of Cyrenaica. The role of the head of the zawya was to teach the Qoraan and spread the teachings of the Senusi order. One of the ways the zawyas attracted followers was through distribution of food and clothing to those who joined it. The zawyas also provided places of refuge for those who needed protection since no one could force his way into the sacred zawyas. Because of their religious position which put

631 634 [625] [795] [175] 795 175 [793] [794] [798]

795 Because of their religious position which put
175 them outside the tribal structure, the leaders of the zawyas played a
627 significant role in mediation and settling disputes between various tri-
793 bal segments. At their disposal was their ability to ostracize anyone
[626] who did not abide by their decision from the zawyas, which meant depriving him from all the benefits, social as well as religious, that membership in the zawyas offered.

795 After the First World War when the British replaced the Turks as
175 governors of the area, the zawyas were closed and the religious leaders
177 ordered to leave. The zoning established by the zawyas existed, however,
[648] and was used as the basis for the redistricting of the area. Police
[631] stations replaced the religious centers. From the standpoint of the tri-
[625] bal population itself, the districts have no psychological or political
619 reality. The zawyas were originally established in the areas of tribal
634 concentrations. But the area itself did not have any political identity.
[795] The only reality from the standpoint of the inhabitants was the tribal
[361] reality and affiliation which cut across many of these districts. Many of the tribal segments inhabiting one district were and still are hostile
177 to one another. To transform the zones into administrative districts and
634 to establish one office of leadership for the whole district was to im-
619 pose a political unity nonexistent among the tribal segments inhabiting
[622] the district. To avoid this difficulty, the government supplemented the territorial principle of the omda system in the rural area with the principle of tribal representation and came up with a system which seems to suite the situation in the Western Desert. For each of the districts, a list of all tribal segments which habitually occupy the area and whose tribal land is located within the district, is made. The most powerful

554 The most powerful
197 and numerous segments are then represented by the omda, and the lesser
634 ones are represented by a sheikh. Unlike the system in the rural areas
619 where the sheikh is a subordinate to the omda, the sheikh in the Western
[622] Desert does not occupy the same position. Instead he has the same functions and occupies, with regard to his tribal segment, the same position the omda occupies with regard to his. He does not take orders from the omda and has direct relations with the administration. Sheikhs and omdas from one district are supposed to meet periodically in the police station and discuss with the police officer in charge of the station matters concerning the district and their own tribal groups. The only difference between the omda and the sheikh in the Western Desert seems to be the label of the office. The label itself carries a certain amount of prestige to the tribal segment represented by the omda, since it is an acknowledgement by the government of its importance. This is why many of the tribal segments try to be represented by an omda rather than by a sheikh. In certain districts where two or more strong tribal segments compete for the honor of being represented by an omda, the district may have two or more omdas representing the strong tribal segments and a number of sheikhs representing the lesser tribal groups in the district. Not every tribal segment in a district is represented by an omda or even a sheikh, however. Very small tribal segments may join together and have one sheikh, while others may agree to be represented by one of the larger segment's sheikh or omda.

634 Obviously, the number of omdas and sheikhs differ from one district
554 to another depending on the number of important tribal segments in each.
619 There is no specific rule whereby a certain tribal segment is considered
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634 554 619 657 by the government to be significant enough to be represented. This matter is left almost entirely to the ability of members of a given tribal segment to convince the authorities that their group is sizable enough to give them the right of omda, or at least sheikh's representation. A segment represented by a sheikh may later ask for an omda because of the prestige involved. It is worth noting in this respect that the various tribal segments in the area are eager to be represented in the government administrative structure. Gaining prestige among the other tribal segments is only one motive for such eagerness. Unlike the omda in the [622] rural areas who functions mainly as a representative of the government to the village, the omda or sheikh in the Western Desert is a representative of the people to the government. This is not a theoretical difference but involves a real difference in the relation of the government and the omda, on the one hand, and between the latter and the people 622 his represnets, on the other. The omda in the village is a symbol of 554 authority to his people. He is the undisputed ruler of the village. His 657 authority is backed by his ability to mobilize and use the force put at his diposal by the government, in the implementation of his decisions. Since he is appointed by the government and not elected by the people, he does not have to rely on his popularity to hold or maintain office. His main concern is to please the government, rather than the people of the village to whom he is merely a symbol of authority. There is very little that the village omda can bring to his people form the outside, while he has to implement government policies, collect taxation, apprehend criminals, all tasks which the villagers are not eager to have done.

634 The situation is quite different in the Western Desert. Although
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659 it is the government, represented by the province council, which makes
554 the final decision in appointing the omda or sheikh, yet this appoint-
619 ment is made on the basis of nominations given by the gribal segment
635 or segments which he would represent. Since the tribal segment usually nominates one person, the decision of the council is limited to the examination of the credentials of the nominee and to see if he meets the basic requirements of the law. If a certain nominee is rejected by the council, a very rare occurrence, the matter goes back to the tribal segment to make another nomination. In practice, then, the omda of the Western Desert is elected by the people and the appointment by the government of the omda is significant only in cases where the omda is to represent more than one small tribal segment and each nominates one. Here the council has to choose between the various nominaees and appoints the best
634 qualified. Unlike the omda of the village, the tribal omda is a real re-
554 presentative of his people. Despite the fact that he becomes part of a
657 governmental structure, his basic function is to look after the interest
619 of his tribal group. Or, as one informant put it, "The omda is the ser-
[622] vant of the people." In many cases the best interest of the tribal segment is served through full cooperation of the omda with the government. So far there seems to be very little conflict between the interest of the tribal populations and that of the government. There is very little in
[651] the area that the government demands or needs. There is no taxable land to speak of. There are only a few acres of barley land and even these
634 are minimally taxed. The main responsibility of the omda to the govern-
554 ment is to report births and deaths and give a yearly list of young men
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5: Peters E-5 (1948-1950) 1967 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
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part of a secondary section but not with another. Once contingencies are permitted to enter in, the lineage model ceases to be of use, for what is implied is that at all times some parts of sections structurally situated for feuding do not in fact feud. Other facts can be adduced to show that the structural view is inadequate but, before proceeding to examine these, some general objections to the lineage theory need to be raised. In the first instance, the corner stone in the theory of lineage systems is that they consist of parts which are in balanced opposition. It is no accident that the idiom generally used in discussing the segmentation of a lineage system is that segments bifurcate. Indeed bifurcation is necessary if lineage theory is to make sense, because if at any order there are more than two segments, then combinations can occur which are not comprehended by the theory. In the Cyrenaican lineage the number of segments at the tertiary order is haphazard, in some cases as few as two but in others as many as a dozen or so. Where there are many segments at this order it is rather pointless to speak in terms of balanced opposition. Moreover, at the secondary order of segmentation the number of segments are fairly consistent throughout the tribes, but they number more than two in all of them. It is also a fact that combinations occur and, moreover, these may be between the tertiary segments of two ' opposed ' secondary segments.

Secondly, in lineage theory groups come together to constitute larger segments in opposition to like segments. Yet in lineage societies there is a lack of instituted authority, there are no chiefs distributed throughout the land as heads of segments of the hierarchical orders. This being so, then it is not possible for all the sections of, say, a secondary section to come together; there is no one to command the action. In fact, sections combine in Cyrenaica, but not in the way they should according to the lineage structure. In order to discuss this adequately, a lengthy diversion into an analysis of the distribution of power would be necessary. The matter must rest here with the admittedly somewhat dogmatic assertion that there are men who wield power over groups of varying populations, and that the extent of their domains cannot be understood by reference to orders in the lineage. Perhaps it is for this reason—because, that is to say, lineage theory effectively blocks the exercise—that relatively little has been written about the problem of leadership in these societies.

Thirdly, all segments should be fairly equal in numbers of people and economic resources, if the theory of lineage were to have substance in reality. In Cyrenaica the population of one tertiary segment may be three times or more that of another. Both may be structurally equal in the sense that they are named groups segmenting as a pair of brothers from a common father. As political groups, however, this equality has little meaning. Further, with regard to economic resources, some sections possess several wells and a territory of such extent that it straddles two or even more of what might be called micro-ecological areas. With marked preponderance in numbers and superiority of resources, some groups have grown into dominance, and the evidence points to the existence of this dominance in the past also. However, ' like ' sections may appear on a lineage chart, in political action there is conspicuous disparity. Each tribe possesses one tertiary section or more with a claim to be the owners of the ' Golden Stirrup '; these are large tertiary groups with relatively plentiful resources, with allies in other groups, and, in sum, with the power to terrorize other tribal groups.